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My Daughter
(A Play in One Act)

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Kerala.

SCENE I

It's about 9 pm. Sitting on opposite settees in the bedroom MANMOHAN and NAYANA, married for five years, are reading, MANMOHAN a newspaper and NAYANA a magazine. Now and then, MANMOHAN lifts his eyes from the newspaper and seriously watches NAYANA. But NAYANA doesn't notice it. After a few minutes, MANMOHAN lowers the newspaper and sets his eyes on NAYANA.

MANMOHAN: What's the matter? Sometimes you sound tense and angry. I feel it for days.

NAYANA lowers the magazine and has a serious and surprise look on MANMOHAN.

NAYANA: No. There is nothing.

MANMOHAN: My reading may be wrong.

Pause.

Does anything unhappy in the past hold you, I mean occasionally pull you up?

NAYANA: One can't keep fully off one's past. The good need not pull you up; but the bad may, sometimes.

MANMOHAN: So there is something up in your mind. Tell me what it is.

NAYANA (*nervously*): NO.

MANMOHAN: The emphatic 'No' betrays you.

Pause.

NAYANA: You mean something stings me?

MANMOHAN: Yeah.

Pause.

Shall I ask you?

NAYANA: Please go.

MANMOHAN: You have a lost love?

Pause.

NAYANA (*seriously*): If I have?

MANMOHAN: No problem. I am not concerned about your past.

NAYANA: Then?

MANMOHAN: If you continue the relation?

NAYANA (*angrily*): What if I do? Didn't you for a while have a sweet heart in a brothel? Such relations won't affect us if we are both broadminded.

MANMOHAN has a serious face

MANMOHAN: There is no comparison between my past relation with a prostitute and your present relation with Madan.

Pause.

How dare you say I should be that broadminded to allow my wife to have a paramour?

Pause.

NAYANA: You should know one thing more. Mira need not be your daughter. She can be Madan's as well.

MANMOHAN is taken aback.

MANMOHAN: My God!

NAYANA: Madan and I were long in love. I resisted my marriage with you for I couldn't forget him. But my father threatened me with his suicide if I went with him. And, as I was intimate with him, I couldn't that easily leave him. Then, as he chose to remain a bachelor out of devotion to me, I felt being indebted to him and like yielding to his wishes on me.

MANMOHAN: You were so long cheating me?

NAYANA: I was helpless, not cheating.

Pause.

I feel Mira and I leave you for him, for the good of all.

Long pause.

MANMOHAN: Though she may not be biologically my child, I have no objection at all to raising Mira as my daughter, for I love her that deep. But I can never allow you to continue being in liaison with another man.

Pause.

Can't you think of leaving him for good for a peaceful life with Mira and me?

NAYANA: I am caught in a no-escape situation, with you on one side, he on the other and Mira in between.

MANMOHAN: Don't worry. I will forget and forgive everything if you will keep off him for ever.

NAYANA: I should talk to him first, for I am concerned about his future without me.

Long pause.

NAYANA lays the magazine on the tea table in front, with a serious face, and lies in bed with her back facing MANMOHAN. MANMOHAN looks at her with an anxious face.

SCENE II

The afternoon, after two days. Sitting at a lonely corner in a restaurant, NAYANA and MADAN are sipping tea and munching snacks.

NAYANA: He has discovered it.

MADAN: I see.

NAYANA: How you take it? What shall we do?

Pause.

Shall I leave him for you? No other option for a peaceful life for you, me and him.

MADAN: Then, what about Mira?

NAYANA: We will have her with us.

MADAN: No. I don't feel like keeping her with me, for she need not be my child. So let her be with him.

NAYANA: What you mean? You can't take her as your daughter?

MADAN: No. I can't. And, I should be frank. You are not the only woman I enjoy.

NAYANA is in shock and she perspires.

NAYANA: My God!

Pause. NAYANA's eyes are filled with tears.

Though I served my husband as a dutiful wife, I did not extend him any love, for my love was all for you and Mira. And, the poor man! He was all love and devotion to me. And, even after detecting the treachery and my disclosure to him that I couldn't say whether you or he is Mira's biological father, he has the mind to accept me as his dear wife and Mira as his dear daughter, But you. . .

MADAN: He may be a good man. But I do have you just for physical pleasure. Love or morality doesn't hold me. If you want I will continue the as it is relation with you. Otherwise . . .

Long pause. A pensive NAYANA gets up.

NAYANA: Thank you for everything and goodbye.

NAYANA speedily walks out and MADAN looks at her with a smile.

SCENE III

Early next morning. MANMOHAN and NAYANA are lying in bed. MANMOHAN gets up, enters the bathroom and returns after having toilets. NAYANA, who couldn't sleep the night, remains in bed with eyes open.

MANMOHAN: Why don't you get up?

NAYANA: Will you please sit by me?

MANMOHAN sits by NAYANA on the bed. NAYANA sits up, lays her head on MANMOHAN's chest and holds him with her hands.

NAYANA: Will you forgive me?

MANMOHAN: Have no doubts.

Pause.

NAYANA: I am mistaken. For him I am only one among the many women he enjoys and . . . and he won't take me as his wife or Mira as his daughter.

NAYANA's eyes are filled with tears. MANMOHAN wipes NAYANA's tears with his right hand and holds her tight with his both hands.

MANMOHAN: Don't worry. Mira is my daughter. And. . . you, you are mine, mine only.

MANMOHAN kisses NAYANA's cheeks a number of times.

CURTAIN

Third-person Biographical Note:

P R Gopalakrishnan was born at Mulanthuruthi, Travancore-Cochin (now Kerala), in 1950. He had his schooling at Chottanikkara and Mulanthuruthi, Pre Degree and B Sc (Mathematics) at the Maharaja's College, Ernakulam, Kochi, and a Post-graduate Diploma in Journalism at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. For 28 years he was on the service of the erstwhile State Bank of Travancore. He resides at Chottanikkara, Kerala. Some of his writings have been published in 'The Criterion'.